

# New commission seeks gold in a wide variety of sports

BY NATHALIE GOUILLOU

[ngouillou@herald.com](mailto:ngouillou@herald.com)

Hoping to cash in on the profit potential of sports events, Miami-Dade County has created a group designed to lure athletes — and their families and friends — to South Florida.

The effort got underway Friday, with the first meeting of the Miami-Dade Sports Commission.

Its task is to attract year-round sporting events of all types, hoping to draw participants, relatives and fans who will then spend their cash on hotel rooms, food and rental cars.

"We need to be creative for tourism," said Marcia Monserat, a spokeswoman for County Commissioner Jimmy Morales, who is spearheading the new tourism push. "The traditional husband and wife going to the beach doesn't do it anymore."

Broward is also trying the approach, and officials there

say \$200 million extra flowed in from hosting 270 sports events during 2002.

And Palm Beach hosted 23 events, which the county said added \$29.7 million to its tourism bottom line.

The sports commission is the creation of Morales, a mayoral candidate, and Homestead Councilman Steven Bateman, who both hit on the idea at the same time.

Using a \$25,000 start-off budget, the nine-member commission will target corporate sponsors to help attract and underwrite events.

Friday, the group elected Larry Gautier of the Keyes Co. as its head. The commission also includes representatives from the county, the school board and hotel and tourism groups.

The commission is hoping to use Broward's success as a model and a motivator.

Broward recently hosted the National Hockey League All Star Game and the Orange

Classic Soccer Tournament, which pulled in thousands of extra visitors.

But John Webb of the Broward Sports Commission said less traditional tournaments such as volleyball, bowling, chess and synchronized swimming, also contributed new dollars.

In Miami-Dade, officials are hoping to take advantage of some sports venues that don't get a lot of use, such as Homestead's baseball stadium, and also spread the wealth around the county.

"We'll be using the facilities of all 34 municipalities in Miami-Dade," Bateman said.

Morales said he wants to create a sports capital that will bring in athletes. Then, people coming to see their kids, husbands or wives compete might get hooked on South Florida, stay a few more days and leave a bit more money behind.

"Think of it as the Orange Bowl [Festival] all 12 months of the year," Morales said.